

1-2006

## Children's Rights and the Parental Authority to Instill a Specific Value System

Jeffrey Morgan

*University College of the Fraser Valley*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Morgan, Jeffrey (2006) "Children's Rights and the Parental Authority to Instill a Specific Value System," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 10.

# Essays in Philosophy

A Biannual Journal

Vol. 7, No. 1, January 2006

## Children's Rights and the Parental Authority to Instill a Specific Value System<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Liberals who want to support multiculturalism need to be able to justify the parental authority to instill cultural value systems or worldviews into children. However, such authority may be at odds with liberal demands that citizens be autonomous. This paper argues that parents do not have the legitimate authority to instill in their children a specific value system, contrary to the complex and intriguing arguments of Robert Noggle (2002). Noggle's argument, which draws heavily on key ideas in Rawls' theory of justice, is that children are not moral agents and that parents are in a special kind of fiduciary relationship vis-à-vis their children. Noggle's position is contrasted with the more limited conception of parental authority advanced by David Archard (2002). I argue that we can accept that parents are agents of their children, but contra Noggle, this does not entitle them to impose their parochial value systems onto their children. I argue that while children have an interest in acquiring values, they do not have an interest in acquiring a value system.

This paper is concerned with the limits of parental authority. The issue is important for those who support both multiculturalism and liberalism, because on the one hand, support for multiculturalism requires toleration of the transmission of culturally specific—and potentially constricting—values to children, but on the other hand, liberalism requires that children develop into autonomous citizens. This is problematic because if the state were to forbid the transmission of parental values to children, then it is hard to imagine how minority cultures could survive for very long, given that the only plausible means for a minority culture to survive would be for children to be initiated into their parents' cultures. However, if the transmission of parental values and worldviews to children violates the rights of children to develop into autonomous adults, then there is a *prima facie* case against allowing parents to instill their own worldviews into the children. Liberalism requires that citizens are autonomous, that is, are able to freely and equally participate in political processes,<sup>2</sup> but the inculcation of parental values may put the child's—or rather the adult that the child will become—very autonomy at risk. If parents are given the broad authority to pass on their own worldviews to their children, then a central principle of liberalism is at risk of being violated. This paper argues that while parents do have limited authority to pass on some values, their authority does not entitle them to pass on value systems or worldviews to their children.

Now, it is obvious that children's lives are affected, often for the better, by the *de facto* authority of their parents. They teach their child a language; they structure the child's environment and thereby limit the child's experiences; they introduce their child to various activities and practices, and so on. They can do these things because they have authority over their children. However, the justification of this authority is unclear. Why do parents need this authority? Skeptics regarding parental authority—child liberationists—argue that children have or ought to have the same rights as adults,

and that parental influence is highly problematic if not downright illegitimate (see Holt 1975 and the excellent discussion of this view in Chapter 4 of Archard 1993). However, the liberationist position is not broadly accepted; indeed, there is widespread agreement that, unless there is serious deficiency in the parent, some parental authority over the child is justified. Still, the grounds on which this authority is justified, as well as its limits, remain unclear. Can the parent legitimately compel her child to learn to love classical music but to abhor jazz and rock music? Can a vegetarian parent rightfully refuse to allow his child to eat meat, even if the child expresses a strong desire to eat a hamburger? Can the parent legitimately cause a child to accept a particular religious commitment, through religious instruction, compulsory ritualistic practice, and through censorship of scientific and literary texts? (see Callan 1985) Is it acceptable for parents to initiate their children into restrictive and isolationist religious communities that strongly influence the child to accept early marriage within polygamist unions?

Consider the case of the children of the rural community of Bountiful in Southeastern British Columbia, near the border with Idaho. The residents of Bountiful are members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, a species of Mormonism that still practices polygamy. This religion has a branch in Colorado City, Arizona, and there is significant movement between the two communities. The morality of polygamy itself is not at issue in this paper, but there are dimensions of life in this community that raise serious issues for legitimate parental authority. Children in this community are a form of spiritual capital; the more children a man has, the higher a degree of heaven to which he can ascend. To this end, one man, William Blackmore, has twenty-six wives and about eighty children, as of 2003. Furthermore, children in this community are raised to want to accept the doctrines of this faith, and girls as young as fourteen or fifteen are getting married (although the marriages are ‘celestial,’ not legal). Perhaps these marriages are consensual, but at issue is the parental authority to raise children to accept such early marriages as tolerable or even desirable. Interestingly, the lot of boys within this community is not much better than that of girls. While a few boys become members of the community—and thereby qualify for multiple wives—many are sent packing at an early age, with little further contact with the family. Obviously, if some men are to have multiple wives, there will not be sufficient numbers of women for all the children of this community.<sup>3</sup> I will return to these examples later in the paper.

It will be worthwhile to begin with a brief account of the nature of parental authority, since that will be my focus in this paper. Parental authority is a species of political rather than epistemic authority. Hopefully, parents will know more than their young children, but we are not concerned here with whether parents should be trusted authorities on epistemic matters (see Peters 1968 or Hamm 1990 for discussions of the distinction between the two forms of authority in an educational context). We are concerned rather with whether parents have a right to be obeyed by their children, and whether they may legitimately employ some forms of coercion to limit the future development of their child. Thus, it might be said that parents can legitimately demand that their children attend religious training classes and can legitimately punish non-compliant children. However, like all forms of legitimate political authority, parental authority is limited; it is limited by the parameters of the institution of the family, which is further limited by general social or moral norms. So parents do not have absolute authority over their children, and cannot neglect or abuse them. Furthermore, like other forms of political authority, parental authority is, at most, provisional: parents have authority over their children for specific purposes and temporarily. The specific purposes of parental authority

remain unclear, however, and without a clear account of the specific purposes of parental authority, it will be impossible to ascertain the scope of legitimate parental authority.

This paper examines a plausible defense of parental authority that provides quite extensive powers to parents over their children on the grounds that children, but not parents, exhibit a special form of immaturity. In ‘Special Agents: Children’s Autonomy and Parental Authority’ Robert Noggle (2002) argues that children lack ‘moral agency,’ and that parents therefore must be granted authority over children: first, in order to enable them to become fully developed moral agents, and second, for the community to trust that children are being appropriately initiated into the moral community. According to Noggle, parents have authority over their children, but their authority is limited by the overall purpose of the parent-child relationship, which is to bring up children to become members of the moral community. Children have rights to have this purpose fulfilled, although these rights are more accurately said to be held by the moral agent that the child will become. We can say that the children’s rights in this respect are more accurately ‘rights-in-trust,’ to use a term coined by Joel Feinberg (1981). They are ‘in-trust’ because the child—lacking moral agency—cannot very well make claims based on this right, but others including the parents and the state, must ensure that these rights are protected on the child’s behalf. I will argue that Noggle’s argument suggests a promising approach to justifying parental authority, but that it fails to support a parents’ right to pass on religious or other parochial values to her children.

### **Noggle on Parental Authority**

Noggle (2002) defends an account of parental authority that steers a middle course between the liberationist and the property approaches to parental authority. Noggle sees parent-child relationships as a species of fiduciary relationship, in which the parent is an agent for the child. Parent-child relationships bear many resemblances to fiduciary relationships: both involve two parties, a principal whose rights and interests are to be protected, and an agent who is entrusted with the task of protecting those rights and interests; both allow the agent a fair degree of discretion in acting on behalf of the principal, and in both cases this discretion is contingent on continuing to protect and advance the principal’s rights and interests; and both are intended to remedy a lack of competence in the principal—it is because children lack the capacity to satisfy many of their needs and interests that they need others to act on their behalf. However, Noggle notes, parent-child relationships typically assign to parents authority over children, but other fiduciary relationships have no such analogue. One can ignore, however foolishly, the advice of one’s physician, lawyer or accountant—one can even, with relative ease, sever these relationships—but parents have at least some power to coerce their children to follow their commands. So, for Noggle, parental authority is problematic if we conceive of parent-child relationships as a species of fiduciary relationships.

Noggle does not give up on the fiduciary model of parent-child relationships on this account, however. Rather, he develops an argument that justifies parental authority on account of the fact that children lack a certain sort of maturity. Noggle rejects the idea that parental authority is justified on account of a ‘global’ cognitive deficiency on the part of children. He points out that such an account might succeed for very small children, but that many adolescents clearly do not have global cognitive deficiency, since they are often superior to many adults in at least some respects. Assuming that adolescents are still legitimately under the authority of their parents, then we must look for the grounds of parental authority elsewhere. To this end, Noggle attempts to identify a *specific* way in which children and adolescents can be said to lack capacities that the adult

possesses. Furthermore, these deficiencies must be relevant to the need for an agent—a trustee—to manage one’s affairs. Accordingly, Noggle distinguishes between two forms of agency. On the one hand, there is ‘simple agency,’ which is displayed when a person “sets and deliberately pursues some goal, or deliberately provides for her immediate needs and interests.’ (Noggle 2002: 101) Simple agency requires that one is able to ‘engage in the rational, intentional, and deliberate pursuit of goals.’ (101) On the other hand, one displays ‘moral agency’ when she can ‘interact with other moral agents on equal terms’ (2002: 100), and is a full citizen in the moral community (2002: 101).

Noggle’s thesis is that parental authority can be justified on account of its capacity to bridge the simple agency of childhood with the fully developed moral agency typical of adulthood. There are three criteria for moral agency. First, the moral agent must possess ‘temporal extension’ or the capacity to ‘see herself as persisting over time, to take into consideration her long-term interests and needs, and to formulate and pursue long-range projects.’ Second, moral agents possess a sense of moral decency, allowing one to ‘get along with others without arousing their (legitimate) moral indignation.’ (2002: 101) Finally, the moral agent must possess a conception of the good, involving ‘the ability to construct and act according to a relatively stable set of values, goals, and fundamental concerns that give the agent direction in living not only as an impulse driven creature, but as a reflective moral agent.’ (2002: 101) Because children do not meet these three criteria, Noggle argues, they are not moral agents. This opens the door for a form of parental authority, as we have a significant distinction between the position of principals in relation to their agents, and children with respect to their parents. Further, Noggle’s approach clarifies *specific* ways in which children lack capacities that would enable them for being principals in a typical fiduciary relationship, and also clarifies the very need for a trustee relationship as well.

Noggle’s first criterion for moral agency is temporal extension, which refers to the capacity possessed by an individual if ‘she has and pursues a set of goals that remain fairly stable over time, or when she provides for both her short-term and long-term interests.’ (2002: 101) Noggle claims that this stable set of goals constitutes a value system—by which he means a higher-order set of values by which an agent evaluates first-order wants (see Frankfurt (1988) for a classic account of this idea). Noggle also refers to these higher order values as commitments, and argues that young children do not have commitments at all, and the commitments of older children are not stable enough to accurately predict their persistence into adulthood. An adult’s commitments change, obviously, but changes are usually gradual and do not involve radical changes in one’s identity; in general, we can predict that the most fundamental values of an adult will change relatively little, at least in the short term. My values give my life a continuity that is unavailable to the child who has wants but no capacity to evaluate her wants. Further, Noggle argues that the fact that adults will ordinarily have experienced changes in their own preferences as they grew up gives them temporal extension that is not available to the child. I *know* that desires that seemed important to me as a nine-year-old came to seem trivial as a thirteen year old. My son, as he is only nine, has had no such experience. So when he would rather ride his bicycle than practice his violin, I can say reasonably claim that this preference does not necessarily reflect established values, but he can have no reason to claim otherwise. Noggle thus asserts that parents possess temporal extension, whereas children do not.

The lack of temporal extension creates problems for children, since it means that they have long-term interests that are incomprehensible to them. They have long-term interests in concern for their

health, for their educational development, for their economic well-being, and so on. However, these interests will seem very abstract to them, and even if they can be made to understand that they will grow older and that different things will matter to them, they will find it difficult to take these ideas seriously. In general, children are incapable of identifying with their future selves sufficiently to ensure that their long-term interests will be met. Therefore, parents must be given the authority to make prudential decisions on behalf of the child, so that their long-term interests can be protected. In Noggle's view, the parent is not merely an agent for the present child, but also for the adult that the child will become. The parent therefore exercises 'surrogate prudence' such that 'the child ought to obey the (competent) parent simply because it is in her best interest to obey the directives of a person who is manifesting prudence on her behalf if she cannot do so herself.' (Noggle 2002: 103)

However, parental authority conventionally goes much deeper than mere surrogate prudence. This is because the child's lack of temporally extended agency precludes her from full participation in the moral *community*. Children cannot participate as full members of the moral community because they cannot engage reliably in long term projects, they cannot participate in cooperative enterprises, they cannot effectively manage their resources over time, and they cannot fully participate in any domain that presupposes responsibility. However, children have future selves who will (likely) be members of the moral community, so it is imperative that parents step in and act as surrogates for the authority of the future self of the child. Adults are assumed to be able to look after their own short-term and long-term interests because they are capable of identifying a future self as identical with a present self. This observation leads Noggle to make three points about how parents act as surrogates for the authority of the future self of the child (Noggle 2002: 103-4).

First, parents are responsible for limiting the child's choices, so that there is a balance between the present and future interests of the child. Second, parents take legal and moral responsibility for the child, ensuring that the child keep her commitments, for example in club participation, in school attendance, and even in such personal areas as maintaining decency in friendship. Third, parents must take on the educative role of preparing children for full-fledged membership in the moral community. After all, it is in the child's future interests to become a member, and the child cannot very well take on the role of being her own educator; therefore, the parent must ensure that the child acquires the 'experience, motivational stability, and deliberative skills necessary to extend her own agency into the future' (Noggle 2002: 105). These three responsibilities necessitate that the parent has authority over the child, but also point in the direction of the limits to this authority. Overall, the goal is for the future self of the present child to be able to take on these responsibilities herself, so parental authority is constrained by the authority of the child's future self.

Here Noggle makes a clever move. Faced with the 'serious epistemic problem' of choosing for the future self of a child, when the particulars of that child's identity cannot be known, the adult must find a way of taking into account the interests of a future self, when those interests are not yet fixed. Noggle introduces the idea of a 'parental veil of ignorance' here, arguing that there are important analogies between the position of Rawlsian contractors who must protect the interests of someone whose particular identity they do not know, and parents, who must protect the interests of a future person that they do not know. The analogy suffers some obvious flaws, which Noggle is quick to point out. For example, parents<sup>4</sup> do have some knowledge of their children from birth; indeed, we know something of our children even before they are born. Except in special circumstances, parents know from birth the sex, race, and something of the culture, religion, language and family life of the



child—since they themselves will offer that background. Further, Noggle notes that typically the child's identity will become more stable, and consequently parents enjoy a gradually clearing conception of the child's identity, enabling to some extent the parent to exercise her authority in a manner that is sensitive to the child's own identity. However, Noggle insists that we do not exaggerate the knowledge we have of a child's future identity—as he says, 'the quiet traditional Catholic girl that the parents are now raising, ...might turn out to be a gregarious lesbian Zen Buddhist' (2002: 107).

Drawing further on the Rawlsian metaphor, Noggle borrows Rawls' conception of a primary good, and adapts it to guide legitimate parental authority. A primary good is something one would want whatever else one wants. These are goods because the more of these goods one possesses, the more likely one will be in carrying out one's projects: Rawls lists 'rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth' as primary goods (Rawls 1971: 192). Noggle accepts the centrality of primary goods in his model of parental authority, but notes that because Rawls' model was developed with a focus on goods that could be supplied by social institutions to adults who have already attained moral agency, there are other goods that parents must keep in mind. To this end, Noggle develops a hierarchy of goods, meant to provide a model for parental decision making on behalf of the child. His hierarchy has five levels, ranked in order of typical urgency. By this he means that under ordinary circumstances, parents should ensure their children have adequate supplies of higher ranked goods prior to moving onto lower ranked goods. Noggle's hierarchy places basic goods essential for life as most important, followed by pre-primary, primary, secondary, and specialized goods. Pre-primary goods include the necessities for moral agency, (temporal extension, a sense of the good, and a sense of moral decency). A 'secondary good' is one which does 'not harm anyone to whom it is provided, but which may not be useful to *everyone* to whom it is provided, though it will be useful to a wide variety of people with a wide variety of conceptions of the good, life-plans, and worldviews' (2002: 107-8). Finally, once the child has an adequate supply of the higher-ranked goods, parents are entitled to provide more specialized goods, that serve interests specific to their individual child.

The concept of a secondary good warrants further clarification. Noggle includes 'continuity with biological ancestors, membership in a religious or intellectual tradition that has been passed down by one's ancestors, ties to an ancestral homeland or social and ethnic heritage' as potential secondary goods. We will consider these goods in more detail below, but for now we need to note that secondary goods are trumped by primary goods, as well as pre-primary and basic goods. The parent can offer these goods to children, providing they do not conflict with the provision of more pressing (higher) needs for children. Noggle explains that it is possible to live a good life without any secondary goods, but that this cannot be said of the higher goods.

The idea here is that parental authority is justified only if serves as a 'bridge between the child and the moral community by providing a kind of surrogate for the authority of the future self of the child' (2002: 104-5). Therefore we are required to ensure that the authority of the future self, along with the interests of the current child, are central to parental decision making. Given our ignorance of the particulars of the identity of the future self of the child, we are compelled to serve this authority by considering what is in the interest of *any* moral agent. We are entitled, according to Noggle, to focus on specific interests of the child, only if those interests are quite clearly elements in the identity of the future self of the child—for example, we might be willing to sacrifice some of

a child's future wealth in order to satisfy the adolescent's clear and stable interest in artistic pursuits. However, these are complex matters that necessitate balancing current needs and interests with long-term needs and interest of the child.

Besides temporal extension, moral agency also requires that one possesses a sense of moral decency and a conception of the good. Noggle is vague about the precise criteria for a sense of moral decency, but he means roughly a minimal sense of moral responsibility – 'a willingness to give and accept moral considerations as reasons for action' (2002: 110). Parental authority in this regard has two dimensions: first, parents are responsible for ensuring their children meet minimal standards of moral development to enter society, and for guiding their particular child's development. The latter task is properly assigned to the parent because the parent can effectively steer their child's moral development in a way that allows for integration with the child's other values. We obviously want to thereby make moral decency as minimally onerous as possible; indeed, it is best if one sees moral decency as an integral element in one's identity, an element that is seen as a precondition of one's happiness and flourishing (2002: 112).

Noggle's final criterion for moral agency is a conception of the good. This criterion is already implicit in Noggle's first criterion above. He argues that rational choice requires a value system on the basis of which one chooses. One's value system includes 'not only moral values, but also the person's personal ideals of the good life, and the fundamental concerns, commitments, attachments, and projects that make her life worth living' (2002: 112) and is often founded upon a world-view, including 'fundamental political, religious, or philosophical convictions (2002: 112). Noggle argues that one needs a value system because values provide criteria by which one can assess one's choices, and without such criteria one would be incapable of choosing for reasons (see Frankfurt 1988 or Taylor 1985). Without such criteria one would be a 'lost soul indeed, for she would lack an evaluative compass to give her life meaning and direction' (Noggle 2002: 113).

Further, he argues that since the child requires a value system, there are good reasons for permitting the parents to instill theirs in the child, providing important limits are observed. First, it makes little sense to demand that the child form her own value system, without outside help as it were, because children need some values in order to choose others. Were we to leave children to their own devices here, they could do no more than make random, arbitrary choices. So given that children require some value system, 'we might just as well let the parents instill theirs' (2002: 113), providing that the value system is not unreasonable, intolerant or morally indecent, and that the child does not become 'close-minded with regard to other value systems or world-views' (2002: p. 114). Second, given the value pluralism evident in modern society, it would be impractical and inefficient to demand that parents instill values other than their own in their children. Third, allowing parents to pass on their own value systems has the benefit that it will contribute to intergenerational continuity, which has already been designated a secondary good. Finally, Noggle comments that passing on their value system to their children has the benefit of perpetuating their own value systems (2002: 114). While this last point supports liberal multiculturalism, it is out of step with the major thrust of Noggle's defense of parental authority which is that it is beneficial to the child and to the moral community.

I have serious reservations about Noggle's argument for allowing parents to instill their own value system or worldview in their children. The problem is that allowing parents to instill their own fundamental political, religious and philosophical convictions in their children may (a) be more than



what is justified by the need for children to acquire values on which to base their decisions, an (b), may pay insufficient regard to the child's rights to form an identity which is his own. I will return to these points later, after I have considered arguments by Archard (2002) that run in a decidedly different direction.

Noggle's approach to parental authority is attractive partly because it suggests a middle way between the excesses of focusing on parental rights and of focusing on the rights of children. On the one hand, there is relatively little place for parental rights in Noggle's approach; his principal concern is the future moral agency of children, which is a matter of the child's rights. The prime issue for Noggle is in ensuring that the short *and* long term interests of the child are served; Noggle also takes seriously the interests of the moral community, but he argues that these interests are coherent with the interests of the child—the long term interests of the child include being a member of the moral community. On the other hand, Noggle's account does indeed emphasize the child's rights, but glosses these rights such that they are significantly long-viewed. The child's rights do not permit her to make significant choices regarding her long term future, but rather require others to safeguard those interests. This is an important distinction, since it allows us to take seriously the idea of children's rights without taking an implausibly liberationist approach: on Noggle's account the child's rights include the right not to have one's wishes necessarily honored.

Moreover, Noggle's argument, if sound, would provide strong support for multiculturalists. Members of minority cultures correctly note that if they are denied the right to pass on their distinctive cultures, then those cultures would be at risk of extinction. The right to inculcate their young into their specific cultures is essential to the continued existence of the culture, especially if it is hard to imagine a person freely choosing the culture as an adult or, worse, if the culture requires blood ties for full membership. Archard (1993, 2002) argues that parents do not have the right to compel their children to accept the parents' worldviews, and this would clearly put the culture's continued existence in jeopardy.

A curious<sup>5</sup> feature of Noggle's justification of parental authority is that it permits parents a great deal of influence over the future lives of their children, but on broadly liberal grounds. Noggle allows a significant degree of traditional values to be passed on to children, but he does so on the basis of a liberal value of future autonomy. Noggle's adaptations on the model of fiduciary relationships serves this purpose well, always reminding us that the parents' principal concern must be to promote the child's best interests, both short and long term.

On Noggle's account, parents enjoy a broad right to instill their own value system into their children. This right derives from the need for children to develop a value system in order to have grounds for reflective decisions, a capacity that is in turn required for moral agency. Given that the child's acquisition of moral agency is the principal justification of parental authority, we have a strong justification for the parent's right to instill their own values system and worldview into their children. However, there is a countervailing consideration in Noggle's account. The acquisition of a worldview is deemed a secondary good, but such goods occupy a low level in his hierarchy. Thus, the parent's right to inculcate her own value system in her young is circumscribed by other goods, including basic, pre-primary and primary goods. Consequently a parent's right to instill value systems and worldviews is limited only if those values are intolerant, unreasonable or morally indecent, or if there is a danger that the child will become close-minded toward other belief

systems. This is meant to permit wide latitude for the parents.

Let's consider some examples. In the introductory paragraph, I mentioned three situations. First, there are the parents who compel their child to learn to love classical music and to despise other forms of music. Second, I offered the example of vegetarian parents who refuse to allow their child to eat meat—although we might as easily imagine the case of parents who compel their vegetarian-inclined child to eat meat. My third example concerns the children of Bountiful, who are raised within a restrictive religious community with controversial marriage practices, including polygamy and adolescent marriage. It is the goal of the community to rear the children to accept the doctrines of the faith and to live according to its normative practices. In all three of these cases, the parent has a value system or worldview that they intend to pass on to their child.

According to Noggle, in each of the above cases the parent has the legitimate authority to cause the child to acquire the specific values and beliefs in question, unless there is a good reason to doubt the morality of the parents' value systems or to believe that the child is in danger of becoming close-minded to other worldviews or value systems. The burden in these examples is thus on those who would want to restrict parental authority. In the case of the children of Bountiful, the problem is complex, but it seems that we must limit parental authority. The children in this community are raised to accept morally controversial practices—i.e. polygamy—and are raised within a community that does not respect equality between men and women, or even amongst men themselves. Further there is the practice of very young women—girls really—accepting marriages with much older men. Even where these marriages and the consequent sexual relationships satisfy the demands of the law, there is reason to doubt the morality of the marriages. While the young women have consented to these arrangements, their consent is at least partly explained by the limited education that they received within the community. There are therefore grounds to doubt the morality of the outcomes of the lives of children in Bountiful. So Noggle's thesis would probably allow us to question the legitimacy of the authority of the parents in this community, at least on certain issues.

In the first two cases, I doubt that any such grounds can be discovered: there is nothing convincingly immoral or intolerant about classical music elitism or vegetarianism, and except in the most extreme of cases we accept diverse musical tastes and dietary practices in adults. Moreover, at least in pluralistic democracies, the child is likely to be exposed to other ways of life and is unlikely to become entirely close-minded to other ways of life (see McLaughlin 1984). For Noggle, in these cases, it seems that the parents possess a right to compel their children to accept specific values, and that this right of the parents is justified on the basis of the interests of the child herself.

### **Archard on Parental Rights**

Yet do parents really possess this right to inculcate values? In a paper published in the same volume as Noggle's, Archard (2002) argues that parents do not possess the right to inculcate values in their child. Such rights would rest on the assumption either that children are the parent's property or that children are extensions of their parents. Both positions are rejected by Archard, the first on the ground that children are not property at all (2002: 148), and ought not to be thought of as mere objects. Regarding the second possibility, Archard allows the insight that children might be thought of as extensions of oneself, but points out that this does not justify the parent to determine the course of the child's life. Suppose that one identifies with some larger group that gives one's life substance and meaning, for example a religious group, a friendship, or a Boy Scout troop. Surely

one's identification with these larger groups does not in itself extend one's right to self-determination over the other members of the group. Archard argues that if parents possess rights to determine the future values of their children, these rights do not derive from the nature of parent-child relations, but must derive from the interests of children. This is the approach that is taken by Noggle, as we have seen.

Archard does agree that parental authority can be legitimate, but denies that this amounts to a right to inculcate specific values in order to initiate the child into a cultural or religious tradition. Archard holds that the parents have authority over family life, including authority to guide family activities—Archard claims that this is the 'right of a family to live together and to participate in common activities' (2002: 151); these shared and intimate activities will naturally lead to a sharing of family values, although the inculcation of values is not directly aimed at by the parent. Archard offers two examples, the first of a 'father who regularly takes his son to see a local sports team play' (2002: 150), and the second of a family that practices a specific religion together. In both cases, it is easy to imagine that the child will come to share the values of the parent. However, the parent in neither case need directly aim at the imparting of values.<sup>6</sup>

Noggle and Archard agree on one important point, despite their general disagreement: both assent to a limiting condition on the influences of parents, namely the right of children to a future that is 'open'. Both Noggle and Archard understand this to imply a future in which the child is autonomous, or capable of reconsideration of the values that they acquired in their childhood. This is an important condition, but it is easier for Archard to meet than it is for Noggle.

In arguing that parents have a right to instill their value system in their children, Noggle permits the parent to engage in a variety of techniques that are denied to parents by Archard. Consider again the vegetarian parents mentioned above. Archard would presumably allow these parents to choose the foods that may be eaten in their home, the restaurants at which the family will dine, and the food purchased by the family. Given that very young children have limited means to make their own food choices and that the child may be introduced to such an environment at or near birth, it is easy to imagine that she will come to share her parents' dietary values. However, Archard would deny to parents a right to engage in activities that are specifically designed to initiate children into their value system. Moreover, Archard would reject any demands by parents to have their values enforced by the outside community—they could not, for example, insist that the school present all other dietary practices as immoral, nor could they insist that other people in the community reinforce the parents' values.

Perhaps the discrepancy between the views of Noggle and Archard will come clearer if we consider a fourth example: homophobic parents who want their child to accept their prejudices. Probably, though not necessarily, the parents belong to a religious community that supports their emotions and beliefs. The parents teach their child that homosexuality is forbidden in the sacred texts and is immoral on other grounds as well; they attempt to censor their child's reading materials so that she does not encounter any positive portrayals of same-sex relationships; they restrict the child's relationships to children of other like-minded parents; they strive to remove their child from any environment where a gay or lesbian would be in a position of positive authority over the child, such as doctor, teacher or counselor. Later, they invoke feelings of guilt or shame in children who appear to be homosexually inclined; in extreme cases, they sever ties with—disown—homosexual

children.

For Archard, parents do not possess the right to instill their values in their children and so homophobic parents will be forbidden from insisting that their children acquire their values. Archard will not have to address the morality of the parents' worldview. However, Archard would allow that the parents can live according to their values, and that they might with their children attend religious institutions that hold their values. According to Archard's position, the parents do nothing wrong in passing on these values indirectly, provided the children do not lack autonomy as adults. An important caveat to Archard's position is that the parents do not have the right to limit the child's experiences outside the home, and therefore cannot object if other elements in the community discuss more inclusive values.

Archard's approach to value education certainly meets the requirement of preserving the child's right to an open future (see Feinberg 1981 for the classic discussion of this idea), but it is implausible to expect it to be applied coherently. Archard would permit parents to bring their children to religious services as part of a shared family life, for example, but he would not allow that the parents take positive steps to inculcate the values of their respective religion. In some cases this is impossible, because many religious groups insist that the children of members be subject to religious instruction within the community, and some esoteric traditions further insist that children be initiated prior to admission to the religious services. However, even in more liberal traditions, it is hard to see how a family could share religious worship without at least some acceptance of the doctrines by the children. I cannot share religious activities with others who do not accept the basic foundations of those activities—it would seem that at least some inculcation of values is necessary for any shared life.

Noggle would object to Archard's proposals regarding the upbringing of children on the grounds that Archard leaves children without a sense of direction; essentially the child is expected to "pick things up" with no direct teaching program on the part of parents. Since Noggle believes that parents have a general right to inculcate moral values into their children, Noggle must find some other way to reject the teaching of such values to children, unless he is willing to pay the price of permitting homophobic parents to raise their child with their values. Noggle might argue that the value system of the homophobic parents is morally indecent or that it is intolerant. I would agree with this response, but he will be in a difficult position if he takes this stance. The problem is that Noggle argues that parents have a right to initiate their child into a specific worldview (which includes a religious tradition) so that the child will have some value system on which to base decisions. This right is limited by moral criteria, as we noted above, but if Noggle argues that any worldview that is homophobic is forbidden on that account, then he will reject a very large percentage of—though not all—religious traditions. Many strands of Christianity and Islam hold that homosexuality is immoral or sinful, and other religious traditions hold similar beliefs. Noggle could respond that the religious parents can raise their children in the religious tradition, but are required to refrain from practices that denigrate homosexuality. However, it is difficult to see how this could be accomplished, at least for many faiths: how do the religious parents select the doctrines to be passed on, when many of these doctrines will be passed on by the authorities of the religion? Sometimes, as with Roman Catholicism, there is a singular authority that has the right to make pronouncements on matters of faith and morality, who asserts that homosexuality is sinful—how can the parent raise her child to be Catholic while rejecting this teaching? It is difficult to see

how Noggle could reject these parents' inculcation of homophobia without rejecting many, probably most, religious traditions. He does not appear to want to do this, since he allows that parents can instill their own conception of the good in their children.

Noggle gets into this predicament as a consequence of his argument that moral agency requires a conception of the good. The individual's conception of the good includes fundamental political, religious and philosophical convictions, and these convictions are essential to rational choice; as noted earlier, one without a value system is a "lost soul indeed." However, his argument could at most support the claim that reflective decisions presuppose *values* on the basis of which one makes one's decisions. He has no argument at all for the claim that the values upon which one makes reflective decisions must constitute a system. By referring to a collection of values as a system of values, one implies that the values are related to each other in a (roughly) coherent pattern. By coherence, I mean that the individual values within the collection must be mutually consistent<sup>7</sup> and either mutually reinforcing or justified by a common source—such as the Qur'an or another authoritative text. Noggle's use of 'worldview' as synonymous with 'value system' further supports this gloss on his intentions here. Noggle is defending the parent's right to inculcate traditional cultural or religious bodies of doctrine in their children. This constitutes indoctrination<sup>8</sup>. He furthermore wants to justify this indoctrination on the basis of the child's rights!

### The Parental Right to Instill Values

It is possible too that there are alternatives to the positions of Noggle and Archard. The basic disagreement is on whether parents have legitimate authority to instill their values in their children. Archard holds that such teaching is always illegitimate. Noggle says that children have a right to acquire a worldview, and that this gives parents the legitimate authority to instill theirs. But it would be possible to agree with Archard that instilling a value system is a violation of the child's rights, and to agree with Noggle that the parents have the authority to teach their children values. The suggestion here is to reject the imposition of value *systems* but to allow the teaching of values, and to allow the teaching of values only to the extent that such teaching does not violate the child's emerging autonomy. In this essay I can do little more than point in the direction of arguments for these possibilities.

First, I argue that moral values need not constitute a system, and further I would argue that moral values are all that Noggle requires. When I say that moral values need not constitute a system, I mean to draw attention to the possibility of value pluralism (see Ross 1930; Walzer 1983; Stocker 1990; Rescher 1993; Rorty 1999 for discussions of value pluralism) and to the possibility that some conflicts between fundamental values are unavoidable. Richard Rorty is well known for his antifoundationalist views on moral values: 'morality is always a matter of compromise between competing goods, rather than ... a choice between the absolutely right and the absolutely wrong' (Rorty 1999: xxvii-xxviii). Value pluralists hold that there are numerous values that one draws on in making reflective decisions, and that these values are not necessarily consistent with each other. Values (and virtues) such as equality, liberty, integrity, courage, care, love, grace, loyalty, civility, friendliness, openness and warmth constitute elements of a person's morality, but they do not necessarily constitute a system. Rather, their application in specific situations may well lead to irresolvable conflicts. The important insight of pluralism, for our purposes here, is that lacking a value *system*—a worldview—need not debilitate us.



A parent persuaded of value pluralism will approach her child's upbringing by imparting a broad range of values as well as, importantly, the capacity to think rationally about their application. The value pluralist eschews talk of absolute values and instead focuses on the development of judgment in cases of conflicting values. Ross, for example, claims that in cases of conflict between competing *prima facie* duties<sup>9</sup>, "what I have to do is to study the situation as fully as I can until I form the considered opinion (it is never more) that in the circumstances one of them is more incumbent than any other" (1930, p. 19). This concept of judgment requires careful analysis, but the point for our purposes here is that reasonable people accept a plurality of values, that these values are not necessarily consistent with each other, and that there will be times when individuals must carefully consider all alternatives and make a decision without the certainty that that decision is the only reasonable decision.

One of the difficulties of Noggle's demand that parents teach their child a value system is that it suggests that the values thus acquired fit together in a morally arbitrary but apparently persuasive structure. Consequently, it will be difficult for the individual to question particular values without thereby questioning all the other values in the system.<sup>10</sup> This partly explains why it is difficult to abandon a religious faith, even after one begins to doubt the epistemological foundations of the faith—one feels directionless, to use Noggle's term. However, if value pluralism is defensible, then any direction that is created by a value system will be arbitrary and constricting.

Further, whether or not a child is initiated into a specific value system, it is possible to encourage him to be reasonable regarding his values. This is part of the work of Rawls' concept of "burdens of judgment" (1993). The Muslim child could be raised with specific Islamic values—rejecting the consumption of pork and alcohol, accepting the values of modesty in dress, and the importance of *Zakat* and *Hajj*—but nevertheless be aware that other, equally reflective, people live differently.<sup>11</sup> Supporting such reflective open-mindedness effectively puts limits on the degree to which the parent can indoctrinate her children.

Finally, it should be noted that children develop gradually, and that it is possible to be sensitive to the emerging identity of one's child, while steering the child in one direction rather than others. For example, a parent may wish for his son a career in professional ice hockey, and may scaffold his son's experiences to attain this end. He enrolls his son in minor hockey leagues, skating lessons, and other physical development activities. The father may attempt to instill in his son a love for the game, and the sense that playing hockey represents a worthwhile form of life with the potential for fame, glory and wealth. Nevertheless, such a program need not be so heavy handed that the father is insensitive to his son's growing interest in other activities, such as philosophy, painting or poetry.<sup>12</sup>

My view is that the parent who holds a specific worldview or value system is wrong to instill that value system in her child. However, children who are raised to accept value pluralism, who are taught the importance of reasonableness and of burdens of judgment, and whose parents are sensitive to their child's developing identity, are unlikely to become so close-minded as to be at risk of losing their future autonomy. This still allows the parent ample opportunity to encourage the child to acquire many values, both moral and otherwise, including some of the values implicit in specific religious or cultural traditions.



Noggle may be correct that children have a right to be taught values, but they do not have a right to be taught a doctrinaire system of values that is morally controversial and difficult to reject. Indeed, it is plausible to suggest that children have a right not to be indoctrinated, and that children have an interest in being protected from value *systems*, especially from value systems that are reinforced by relationships of love and dependence. We must, consequently, reject the alleged rights of cultural or religious groups to perpetuate themselves through direct initiation of children.

### Conclusion

In general, Noggle's general approach to clarifying parent-child relationships is imaginative, clever, persuasive and promising. His argument is that parent-child relationships are a special class of fiduciary relationships, but differ from the standard case inasmuch as the standard case has no analogue to parental authority. I have not challenged this assertion, nor have I challenged Noggle's claim that parental authority can be justified under the model of fiduciary relationships. Further, I have not challenged Noggle's application of Rawlsian ideas to parent-child relationships; implicitly, I have accepted both his metaphor of a parental veil of ignorance and his development of the hierarchy of goods based on the centrality of primary goods. Moreover, I have not even challenged Noggle's claim that membership in cultural or religious traditions may well be a secondary good, although I have reservations about the generality of this claim, since it appears that many—perhaps all—cultural or religious traditions have serious costs associated with them. However, I *have* challenged Noggle's claim that his model of parental authority supports a parental right to instill parochial values in children.

So if cultural and religious membership is a secondary good, and thereby worth passing on to children, and if there is no parental right to instill the values of specific religious or cultural tradition, then we must pass on these values in less direct ways. Archard's approach to transmitting cultural and religious values indirectly does provide at least one possible approach to parental authority that allows some transmission but does not permit the direct approach favored by Noggle. However, Archard's approach will seem rather weak to many parents who want to promote their cultural values in their children.

Where does this leave us with respect to the question of liberalism and multiculturalism with which we began? My view is that there are serious costs of allowing that parents have the legitimate authority to pass on their worldviews to their child. My objections are that moral agency does not presuppose anything as strong as the acquisition of a worldview, and that there are serious costs to the acquisition of most traditional worldviews. Multiculturalism, then, must survive without the parental authority to instill value systems or worldviews in their child. That said, I think that parents can—and should—instill values in their child, but that these values: (a) ought not to constitute a system, (b) ought to be presented in the context of a thorough value pluralism, (c) ought to include values of reasonableness and the burdens of judgment, and (d) ought to be presented with awareness of the child's emerging identity. I believe that these conditions can be met, but that they put strong limits on the degree to which the child can be subject to value systems or worldviews constitutive of distinctive cultures.

Jeffrey Morgan  
University College of the Fraser Valley

## Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented at the 2005 East-West Philosophy Conference at the University of Hawaii-Manoa.
2. This view is very widely held. Typically, major liberal writers focus on adult citizens, although influential exceptions are Ackerman (1980) and Levinson (1999).
3. I have relied on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation news program on this community for the above. See <http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/polygamy/polygamy.html#> for a summary of the information. An account of the experiences of a woman who was married to three different men within the community (the first while she was only fifteen) can be found in Palmer and Perrin (2004).
4. I write from the standpoint of ‘birth’ or natural parents; the situation for adoptive parents is more complex, but I do not believe that adoption raises any new philosophical issues regarding parental authority. However, I suspect adoption highlights the issues surrounding the limits of parental authority.
5. I say that this aspect of Noggle’s argument is curious because it leaves out what in many people’s minds is the most salient feature of the parent-child relationship. Parents typically love their children. Indeed, love may seem too weak a term to describe the relationship—consider Nozick’s (1989) claim that one is related to one’s child as one is related to one’s hand. The identity parents feel with their children is undermined by state-interference in these relations. Callan’s (1985, 1997) efforts to defend the right of the parent to instill values in his child emphasizes the need for intense and intimate bonds between parent and child: “A plausible normative theory of the family must accommodate the momentous expressive significance of child-rearing in parents’ lives. By the ‘expressive significance’ of child-rearing, I mean the way in which raising a child engages our deepest values and yearnings so that we are apt to think of the child’s life as a virtual extension of our own” (1997, p. 223). A similar point was pressed by Professor William LaFleur when a previous version of this paper was presented at the 2005 East-West Philosophy Conference at the University of Hawaii.
6. Callan (1985) mentions similar examples.
7. Absolute consistency is not required, but in order to constitute a system there needs to be a high degree of inconsistency between the various values. See the work of Scotch and Jennings (1984) for a useful discussion of working with degrees of inconsistency.
8. The literature on indoctrination is extensive. Most thinkers agree that indoctrination is morally wrong, but they disagree regarding the analysis of the concept. Some (for example, White 1967) argue that one commits indoctrination if one teaches X with the intention that one’s students come to believe X in such a way that nothing will shake their belief that X. The basic problem here is that morally acceptable teaching often has this intention—for example consider the usual teaching of basic arithmetic, logic, spelling, and even beliefs such as Wittgensteinian (1972) riverbed beliefs (“I have a mother and a father,” “My friend’s head is not filled with sawdust”). If good teaching sometimes has these intentions, then it will not do to define indoctrination as a matter of teaching with such intentions. Hand (2002) favors a “results” based approach: for Hand indoctrination is a

matter of imparting beliefs to a child ‘in such a way that she holds them non-rationally, or without regard for the evidence’ (p. 545). Others (e.g., Kazepides 1987) argue that indoctrination is a matter of teaching doctrinal content. An objection to this approach concerns how to distinguish doctrinal content from educationally legitimate content. Why does teaching my daughter that the Pope is infallible constitute indoctrination, whereas teaching her that democratic political systems are more just than alternative political systems constitute good educational practice? Kazepides, I believe, does the best job of clarifying this distinction. A distinctive approach to the concept of indoctrination can be found in Neiman (1991).

9. Ross focuses on duties, but his reasoning here can easily be applied to values.

10. Kazepides (1987) offers an excellent account of the difficulties of extricating oneself from indoctrination into a tight system of doctrinal beliefs.

11. Runzo (2001) distinguishes religious pluralism from a position that he calls henofideism. Henofideism holds that there are multiple religious traditions, that these traditions are not consistent with each other. However, the Henofideist holds that it is nevertheless possible to adhere to a single tradition but be open to the possibility that one’s own values may well be mistaken. This position avoids the relativist tendencies of Hick’s religious pluralism (see for example Hick 1993).

12. I discuss this aspect of the development of autonomy in Morgan (2005). The literature on autonomy is extensive, but a useful recent introduction is Bonnett and Cuypers (2002).

### Works Cited

Ackerman, B. (1980). *Social Justice in the Liberal State*. Yale University Press.

Archard, D. (1993). *Children: Rights and Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Archard, D. (2002). ‘Children, Multiculturalism and Education.’ In D. Archard and C. McLeod (eds.), *The Moral and Political Status of Children*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bonnett, M. and S. Cuypers (2002). ‘Autonomy and Authenticity in Education’ in Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*. Blackwell.

Callan, E. (1985). ‘Indoctrination and parental rights.’ *Philosophy of Education: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society* 41, pp. 97-106.

Callan, E. (1997). “The Great Sphere: Education Against Servility.” *The Journal of Philosophy of Education*. Vol. 31. No. 2, pp. 221 – 232.

Hamm, C. (1989). *Philosophical Issues in Education: An Introduction*. Falmer.

Feinberg, J. (1981). ‘The Child’s Right to an Open Future.’ In W. Aiken and H. LaFollette (Ed.) *Whose Child? Children’s Rights, Parental Authority, and State Power*. Littlefield, Adams & Co.

Frankfurt, H. (1988). ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person.’ In *The Importance of What We Care About*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hand, M. (2002). 'Religious Upbringing Reconsidered.' *The Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, pp, 545-557.
- Hick, J. (1993). *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. Macmillan.
- Holt, J. (1975). *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*. Penguin.
- Kazepides, T. (1987). 'Indoctrination, doctrines and the foundations of rationality.' *Philosophy of Education: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society*, vol. 43, pp. 229-240.
- Levinson, M. (1999). *The Demands of Liberal Education*. Oxford.
- McLaughlin, T. H. (1984). 'Parental rights and the religious upbringing of children.' *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 18, pp. 75-83.
- Morgan, J. (2005). 'Religious upbringing, religious diversity and the child's right to an open future.' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 24, pp, 367-387.
- Nieman, A. (1991). 'Language, Analysis, and Indoctrination.' *Philosophy of Education: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society* vol. 47, pp. 259-263.
- Noggle, R. (2002). 'Special Agents: Children's Autonomy and Parental Authority.' In D. Archard and C. McLeod (eds.), *The Moral and Political Status of Children*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nozick, R. (1989). *The Examined Life*. Simon and Shuster.
- Palmer, D. and D. Perrin (2004). *Keep Sweet: Children of Polygamy*. Dave's Press.
- Peters, R. S. (1973). *Authority, Responsibility and Education*. 3rd ed. Allen and Unwin.
- Rawls, J. (1993). *Political Liberalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Rescher, N. (1993). *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin.
- Ross, D. (1930). *The Right and the Good*. Clarendon Press.
- Runzo, J. (2001). *Global Philosophy of Religion*. Oneworld.
- Scotch, P. K. and R. E. Jennings (1984). 'The Preservation of Coherence.' *Studia Logica: An International Journal for Symbolic Logic*, vol. 43, pp. 89-106, 1984.
- Stocker, M. (1990). *Plural and Conflicting Values*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Taylor, C. (1985). 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in Charles Taylor (ed.), *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

Walzer, M. (1983). *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York.

White, J. P. (1967). 'Indoctrination' in R. S. Peters (ed.), *The Concept of Education*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wittgenstein, L. (1972). *On Certainty*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright; translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. Harper & Row.